

"'Tis false!"—Sebastian bent his knee,
And clasped his hands imploringly,
And said, "I swear it! none but me!"

"List," said his master, "I would know
Who enters here—there have been found,
Before, rough sketches strewn around,
By whose bold hand, 'tis yours to show;
"See that to-night strict watch you keep,
Nor dare to close your eyes in sleep;
If on to-morrow morn you fail
To answer what I ask,
The lash shall force you,—do you hear?
Hence! to your daily task."

* * * * *

'Twas midnight in Seville, and faintly shone,
From one small lamp, a dim, uncertain ray,
Within Murillo's study, all were gone,
Who there, in pleasant tasks or converse gay,
Passed cheerfully the morning hours away.

'Twas shadowy gloom, and breathless silence,
save
That to sad thoughts and torturing fear a prey,
One bright eyed boy was there, Murillo's
little slave.

Almost a child, that boy had seen
Not thrice five summers yet;
But genius marked the lofty brow,
O'er which his locks of jet
Profusely curled; his cheeks dark hue,
Proclaimed the warm blood flowing through
Each throbbing vein, a mingled tide,
To Africa and Spain allied.

"Alas! what fate is mine?" he said,
"The lash, if I refuse to tell
Who sketched those figures; if I do,
Perhaps, e'en more, the dungeon cell!"
He breathed a prayer to heaven for aid.
It came! for soon in slumber laid,
He slept until the dawning day
Shed on his humble couch its ray.

"I'll sleep no more," he cried, "and now
Three hours of freedom I may gain
Before my master comes, for then
I shall be but a slave again.
Three blessed hours of freedom! how
Shall I employ them? Ah! e'en now
The figure on that canvas traced
Must be, yes, it *must* be effaced!"

He seized a brush,—the morning light
Gave to the head a softened glow;
Gazing enraptured on the sight,
He cried, "Shall I efface it? No!
That breathing lip! that beaming eye!
Efface them? I would rather die!"

The terror of the humble slave,
Gave place to the o'erpowering flow
Of the high feelings nature gave,
Which only gifted spirits know!
He touched the brow, the lip; it seemed
His pencil had some magic power;
The eye with deeper feeling beamed;
Sebastian had forgot the hour!

Forgot his master, and the threat
Of punishment still hanging o'er him;
For with each touch new beauties met,
And mingled in the face before him.

At length 'twas finished. Rapturously
He gazed; could aught more beauteous be?
Awhile absorbed, entranced he stood,
Then started; horror chilled his blood!
His master and the pupils all
Were there e'en at his side!
The terror stricken slave was mute;
Mercy would be denied,
E'en could he ask it; so he deemed,
And the poor boy half lifeless seemed.

Speechless, bewildered, for a space
They gazed upon that perfect face,
Each with an artist's joy;
At length Murillo silence broke,
And with affected sternness spoke:

"Who is your master, boy?"
"You, senor!" said the trembling slave.
"Nay, who, I mean, instruction gave
Before that Virgin's head you drew?"
Again he answered: "Only you."
"I gave you none!" Murillo cried.
"But I have heard," the boy replied,
"What you to others said."
"And more than heard," in kinder tone
The painter said, "'tis plainly shown
That you have profited."

"What (to his pupils) is his meed?
Reward or punishment?"
"Reward! reward!" they warmly cried.
(Sebastian's ear was bent
To catch the sounds he scarce believed,
But with imploring look received.)
"What shall it be?" They spoke of gold,
And of a splendid dress,
But still unmoved Sebastian stood,
Silent and motionless.

"Speak!" said Murillo kindly, "Choose
Your own reward. What shall it be?
Name what you wish, I'll not refuse;
Then speak at once, and fearlessly."
"Oh! if I dared!" Sebastian knelt,
And feelings he could not control
(But feared to utter even then)
With strong emotion shook his soul.

"Courage!" his master said, and each
Essayed, in kind half-whispered speech,
To soothe his overpowering dread.
He scarcely heard till some one said,
Sebastian, ask, you have your choice,
Ask for your *freedom*." At the word
The suppliant strove to raise his voice;
At first but stifled sobs were heard,
And then his prayer, breathed fervently,
"Oh! master, make my FATHER free."

"Him and thyself! my noble boy!"
Warmly the painter cried;
Raising Sebastian from his feet,
He pressed him to his side;